

The Sidmouth Beach Garden “Ocean Scene”

In March 2013 a team of plant conservation volunteers took over management of an area of beach along the Millenium Walkway where the storm tides rarely reach. The area was already being colonised with wild coastal plants and weeds and EDDC regularly sprayed the area with weedkiller to keep the vegetation in check. Lynnette Talbot from Sidmouth in Bloom (SIB), persuaded EDDC to stop spraying the area and allow the beach to be used as a plant conservation area. Volunteers from SIB, Devon Plant Heritage (DPH) and VGS worked on the site and EDDC staff helped by digging in an old boat as a feature for the garden. Seaside plants such as the sea beet, tree mallow, horned poppy and rock samphire were already colonising the site and the aim was to increase the biodiversity by introducing other native beach plants that had not yet reached the site.

On 22 March 2013 the Beach Garden was officially opened by local East Devon Plant Personality Anne Swithinbank.



Anne Swithinbank launches the garden



The launching party

Devon Plant Heritage backed the project by helping to grow beach plants from seed sourced from endangered coastal sites in other parts of the county or wider south west. The overall aim was to encourage proper beach plant communities to develop on our beach. A full list of introductions is given later.



The beach garden in 2018

Why should we encourage these plants to grow on the beach?

Beach, dune and saltmarsh plant habitats are relatively rare and the plant communities that grow in them are highly specialised. These habitats are being reduced as more and more development occurs around the coastline and they are also under threat due to climate change and rising sea levels. By their nature beaches form relatively unstable and transient habitats that can be easily destroyed by severe storms or damaged by oil spills etc. Storms, acting together with longshore drift can remove large areas of shingle from one area destabilising or removing the local beach plant community, and depositing the shingle elsewhere where it may block off estuaries and saltmarshes. Once the sea is prevented from washing into a saltmarsh the marsh will lose salinity and change to a freshwater environment.

Most beach plants are capable of growing in a more stable land environment but do not succeed there as they cannot compete against more aggressive land species. Thus some of them like the sea wormwood (*Artemisia maritima*) will grow readily in good garden soil, but like most garden plants will only survive if the gardener continues to weed out more strongly growing competitors that would normally take over the site. Some of these coastal plants are relatively tender and cannot survive the harsh frosts of inland. Plants like the rock samphire (*Crithmum maritimum*) tend to grow in sea walls, rocky crevices in cliffs or very close to the sea where the warmth from the sea or the shelter lessens the chance of freezing. Most of the plants have a high tolerance to salt water which allows them to grow in an environment which would be hostile to the more competitive land plants.

What role do these plants play in our heritage?

Many of our domesticated food plants have been derived from beach plants, thus the various leaf beets, beetroot and sugar beet have evolved from the sea beet, and carrots, parsnips, peas, brassicas, asparagus, turnips and radishes are derived from wild beach plants or close relatives. Rocket is a beach plant that is now widely cultivated for salads, whilst sea kale and some of the saltmarsh plants are grown or collected as gourmet foods. In particular the Saltwort (*Salsola kali*), known as Agretti in Italy, is cultivated or harvested from the wild across southern Europe and a closely related beach plant is harvested and eaten in Japan. Glasswort (various *Salicornia* species) are collected around our coasts as Marsh Samphire.

How can I help?

Please help to maintain and encourage the growth of our native beach plants and discourage vandalism at this or other beach plant sites across the country.

You may wish to help to maintain this or other planted areas around Sidmouth by contacting Sidmouth in Bloom (SIB). (Lynette or Peter 01395 578081)

If you are interested in plants and gardening you could join Plant Heritage. This UK wide organisation that runs the National Plant Collections scheme operates at a local county level. It organises garden events and offers discounted entries to many gardens (often not open to the public) across the country and to the National Collections. The Devon group is the largest county group and contains over 40 National Plant Collections. Pick up the leaflets for details (John 01395 578689)

There are also various Beach clean-up parties such as Sidcombers (organised by SIB) or by other bodies such as Sidmouth Plastic Warriors etc., which can be good fun and a chance to meet like-minded individuals.

Finally

It is important that we educate children and visitors in the role of beach plants in our heritage and that we help these plants to survive in their very transient environment.

Storm Tide Actions on Beach Garden

The winter storms of early 2014 that destroyed part of the railway line at Dawlish, also removed the shingle from the SW corner of the beach garden and flooded the area with seawater. Winter storms around Christmas 2018 created a new higher shingle bar which partially covered the southern edge of the site, burying several plants including the rare dune wormwood. It also wrecked the half buried boat. As at April 2019 attempts are being made to uncover this area of the garden by throwing back the shingle to push the new ridge further towards the sea where it can continue to act as a protective barrier. If you have any time you could help by throwing a few stones back along the boundary area. Lynnette is also looking for a newer boat. Any ideas?

Dr John D Twibell, Devon Plant Heritage



Storm tide action February 2014

Sidmouth Beach Garden Plants

Natural additions (ie arrived on their own)

Sea Beet	<i>Beta vulgaris</i> subsp. <i>maritima</i>
Yellow horned poppy	<i>Glaucium flavum</i>
Rock samphire	<i>Crithmum maritimum</i>
Tree mallow	<i>Lavatera arborea</i>
Wild Rocket	<i>Sisymbrium</i> sp.

Added by SIB/DevonPH

Seakale	<i>Crambe maritima</i> (Weston Beach, Sidmouth)
Sea Holly	<i>Eryngium maritimum</i> (Exmouth)
Vipers Bugloss	<i>Echium vulgare</i> (Branscombe cliffs)
Sea mayweed	<i>Matricaria maritima</i> (Sidmouth)

Sea carrot	<i>Daucus carota</i> (Sidmouth)
Thrift	<i>Armeria maritima</i> (Sidmouth)
Alexanders	<i>Smyrniololus</i> (Sidmouth)
Sea Campion	<i>Silene alba</i> (Sidmouth)
Sea Aster	<i>Aster tripolium</i> (Seaton)
Sea Stock	<i>Matthiola sinuata</i> (N Devon)
Hoary Stock	<i>Matthiola incana</i> (Beer)
Sea Pea	<i>Lathyrus japonicus</i> (Dorset)
Sea Wormwood	<i>Artemisia maritima</i> (Crymlyn Burrows, S Wales)
Dune wormwood	<i>Artemisia crithmifolia</i> (Crymlyn Burrows, S Wales)